

**King County Developmental Disabilities Division
THREE YEAR PLAN
for
Early Intervention Services in King County
October, 2003 through September, 2006
Approved by the King County Interagency Coordinating Council on
September 8, 2003**

Overview of Plan

The King County Developmental Disabilities Division (KCDDD) is the local lead agency for Part C under IDEA. The geographic service area includes the entirety of King County boundaries. KCDDD contracts with the State Department of Social and Health Services, Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program (ITEIP) to implement and maintain a system of early intervention/child development services for children under age three with developmental delays. In examining the local system with its many challenges, KCDDD recommends implementing a series of strategic improvements in the publicly funded early intervention system in King County for infants and toddlers with developmental delays and their families.

The improvements recommended in the Three Year Plan are service system enhancements are intended to address specific issues identified in the various feedback processes and documents, which include Conversations with Families, the Parent Survey, provider feedback, Family Resource Coordinator (FRC) feedback, and the self-assessment by KCDDD staff. These changes are detailed in the Three Year Plan in each of the sections that describe the current service system, challenges, and planned improvements.

In addition improvements are planned that are of an administrative nature and intended to streamline KCDDD's contract management functions with sub-contractors for both state-funded child development services and Part C early intervention services. Recommendations concerning potential administrative changes are outlined at the end of this planning document for informational purposes but are beyond of the scope of the three-year plan that is subject to review and approval by King County Interagency Coordinating Council (KCICC).

According to ITEIP's contract with King County, the Three Year Plan should address the following:

"Implement, maintain, and monitor a three year local Early Intervention Services Plan, to be submitted to the Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program (ITEIP) as required in Section B. Report Schedule. The plan must:

- a. Define the geographic service area.
- b. Identify gaps related to early intervention services and the activities and processes that will be implemented to resolve services gaps.

- c. Describe how the local early intervention system is coordinated, accessible and equitable for all infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.
- d. Describe how the early intervention plan coordinates with other local planning efforts that involve children, birth to three, including County Developmental Disabilities Plans, Health Jurisdictions and other local planning efforts.
- e. Describe how coordinated Child Find activities occur in the geographic service area.
- f. Describe how Family Resources Coordination will occur, including:
 - (1) How families needing assistance will know who to call or see;
 - (2) How the Family Resources Coordinators will work with existing agency case managers and service coordinators;
 - (3) How parents/families will be offered and access Family Resources Coordination, which includes at least two Family Resources Coordinators options for the families in the geographic service area, one of which is not employed by the agency where the child receives direct services, and
 - (4) How Family Resources Coordination occurs at an adequate staff to family ratio to ensure families receive full service. National standards recommend not exceeding 1:45.
- g. Describe how initial evaluations and assessments are coordinated within the geographic service area.
- h. Describe how early intervention services are provided in home and community settings where children without disabilities participate.
- i. Describe how activities for service improvements identified in the local self assessment action plan are being implemented.

Discussed below are descriptions of the current system, as well as identified changes which will enhance these functions.

CHILDFIND AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

Childfind and public awareness activities are currently sub-contracted with the Washington Health Foundation–CHAP Program. CHAP is the central point for distribution of materials and provision of information. CHAP staff also participates in various community efforts and activities at which opportunities exist for screening or information sharing. Participation in such events is a good way to help families become familiar with early intervention and have an opportunity to ask questions about development. CHAP staff may be called upon to attend meetings of organizations where there might be shared clients. Provider agencies also play an important role in childfind in King County through referral networks with pediatricians, hospitals, and schools and by having a visible presence in their communities.

It is clear King County's childfind activities are working as during federal fiscal year 2001-02 there were 1,188 children served, and projections for 2002-2003 are that 1,436

children will be served. We currently serve approximately 1.9% of our 0-3 population—within standard prevalence guidelines of between 1.8%—2.2% of the birth through two year old population.

An ad-hoc sub-committee of the KCICC has been working on developing additional strategies for marketing early intervention services. These strategies are included as part of this plan along with other strategies that are directed at enhancing childfind and public awareness in the county. The following activities will be pursued as part of the three year plan:

- Improve child-find activities and outreach by the producing and distributing pamphlets that are attractive, easily understood, and informative about services that are available in King County; publications will be easy to read, culturally appropriate, and available in multiple languages.
- Provide better information and improve access to the local system for families when they initially seek services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays. Part of this strategy includes CHAP's mailing to all licensed home and center based child care programs, which will include 0-6 Prescreen Charts and a card with CHAP's phone number. Child Care Resources will also include an article in their newsletter to all licensed child care providers. Additional efforts in the future will also include efforts towards articles and appropriate information for distribution in newsletters and community parent magazines such as Seattle's Child and ParentMap.
- Update the KCDDD web site to be consistent with brochures and public awareness information and provides better links to other resources. Explore the possibility of a web-based link to CHAP for information and application.

The current service system seems to work well once a family is connected with a provider or with the central point of entry, CHAP. Referrals are made by a broad variety of people or organizations. Providers have relationships with the medical community where referrals to specific providers are made directly by the physician, or by many other community organizations. Conversations with Families and other feedback revealed that some families have concerns about their own child's development but do not know initially where to turn for assistance. While there is widespread distribution of materials, there seems to be the need for an increased presence so that it is widely known around the county where to call for assistance in entering our system.

Once connected with CHAP or with a direct referral, families can quite easily link to an FRC. That, however, is changing as over the last few months families from the North/Northeast part of the County are finding providers at capacity and have to be referred back to CHAP for referrals to more distant providers.

Until July, 2003 King County contracts with providers for Child Development services provided assurance that if an agency's caseload grew, KCDDD would amend the agency's contract to increase their allocation to cover the growth. However, effective July 1, 2003 KCDDD is no longer making that commitment to contract agencies to

increase allocations to match enrollment. KCDDD staff will continue to monitor utilization of contract funds each month and may be able to make adjustments between agencies if some agencies are serving fewer than the number of children projected in their contracts. System-wide funding increases are not possible as state developmental disabilities funding were not increased by the Washington State Legislature for caseload growth in any of the county-contracted programs including child development services.

Recently KCDDD staff has become aware of increases in reported incidents of agencies turning away referrals due to capacity issues and/or awareness the agency will not receive additional funding for the increased numbers of children served. This is likely to be an on-going and increasingly common problem over the next year as agencies reach their capacity and may not accept new referrals. While KCDDD can meet its contractual obligations to ITEIP by having services available for a child and his/her family anywhere in the county, having a service provider in a distant location is not family friendly or optimal from an agency perspective.

FAMILY RESOURCE COORDINATION

The local system is characterized by a high level of involvement of the provider network that brings professional expertise, provides a variety of service options and locations, and contributes to a diverse funding base for the public/private system. In 2002 this system served a total of 1,254 children under the age of three years and their families. King County contracts with 15 community organizations to provide direct early intervention services, and each of those providers staff their programs to ensure adequate service coordination. While each agency deploys their staff differently and in a way which best reflects their service model and needs, according to the ITEIP data system there are 57 individuals registered as FRCs in King County. While we do not know how many FTEs that figure represents, the lack of complaints and the sheer numbers imply adequate coverage for the 1,254 children served during calendar 2002.

In addition to the provider-employed FRCs, KCDDD contracts with the CHAP program to provide independent FRC services—if a family wants independent FRC services they may receive them from one of the two CHAP FRCs. In addition, beginning April of this year, CHAP FRCs became the designated service coordination organization for families with children who are deaf/hard of hearing. This change will provide increased opportunities for families to receive a wide range of information about the complex issue of service/education models for these children in order to assist them in making a decision which will best fit with their family's priorities and routines.

Most families express high degrees of satisfaction with the direct services that they receive including FRC services. Strengths of our current system include:

- Established referral patterns from physicians, hospitals, and other primary referral sources assist most families to achieve access to an appropriate early intervention services provider in their area in a reasonable amount of time.
- The numbers of children ages birth through two years of age and their families who access these services have increased steadily for the past five years.

- Provider agencies have responded to the caseload growth without substantial increases in funding from KCDDD. The KCDDD contracted funding currently provides an average of under \$1,320 per year in funding to agencies for each Part C eligible child and an additional \$2,172 for each child also enrolled with State DDD and receiving child development services. Agencies have been able to do this because they routinely access funds through contracts with participating school districts, private insurance, Medicaid and other sources. In addition, agencies in King County contribute through their own fund raising efforts such as United Way, auctions, golf tournaments, and other grants with approximately \$1.03 million dollars annually in order to support under funded early intervention services.

This Three Year Plan targets system access and service delivery issues that have been identified as problematic by families that have participated in surveys and focus groups and by participants in two work groups sponsored by KCDDD. These planned enhancements or revisions to the current system include:

- Enhancing service coordination for all families by setting local service standards, designing a curriculum based on the standards, and implementing a new training series for Family Resource Coordinators (FRCs) in King County. This training will enhance that which is provided by the State ITEIP program.
- Maintaining a system of FRCs that are associated with primary service provider agencies. Improvements in service coordination for families that are limited or non-English speaking will focus on promoting the hiring of qualified bi-lingual staff and/or encouraging sub-contracts or interagency agreements with community-based organizations serving ethnic communities.
- Strengthen the transition process as children leave early intervention services at age three. This can be accomplished by continuing to work with school districts and other systems such as DDD to develop a way of providing information to families to become educated around services available once their child turns three and what to expect. Work with providers to let families know children must be re-evaluated for DDD services at age three.
- Increasing the availability of independent FRCs to comply with contractual requirements with ITEIP that extends this alternative to each family. Some families have reported, in surveys and feedback sessions, the need for more information and assistance from a neutral, highly skilled person who is knowledgeable about local resources and options to help them in accessing and coordinating ongoing services. In 2004, KCDDD intends to pilot a small expansion of independent FRC services that will offer the option of independent FRC services to additional families. In keeping with the King County administrative and service delivery models, the FRCs will be employees of a contract agency or agencies. The pilot will likely include out-stationing FRCs to improve access for all geographic areas of the county. County funds will be used for this pilot.
- The independent program review conducted by ITEIP in 2001 identified the need to better address the federal requirements concerning the provision of services

natural environments. Improvements in training for FRCs and the implementation of local standards will address these items that have the potential to be future findings in a federal or ITEIP audit.

Federal law and “best practices” provide for a variety of models of service coordination as proposed in this plan. The proposed systems enhancements expand the choices available to King County families while preserving the basic infrastructure of the local system.

SERVICE SYSTEM COORDINATION

There are hundreds of organizations serving families and children in King County. KCDDD-Early Intervention Program continually assesses opportunities for collaboration with other programs and agencies, especially those with whom we share clients or where there are cross-system connections. At the KCDDD level, most of these collaborations must be restricted to County-wide activities or planning processes. However, recently, more efforts have been made to encourage individual sub-contractors to attend and participate in community or sub-regional activities in an effort to ensure representation of Early Intervention/Child Development programs in activities which encourage or enhance inter-system coordination. Examples of activities which are occurring and are representative of system coordination include:

- Sub-contractor participation at Seattle, North and East FACES (Family and Child Early Support) meetings;
- KCDDD staff attendance at the County-Wide Action Agenda Strategy Steering Committee meetings;
- KCDDD participation with Neighborhood House’s Head Start Plan development;
- Participation on the Children’s Health Access Advisory Committee;
- Participation with United Way Children’s Initiative/Success by Six and the Welcome Baby Project;
- Participation on the Seattle Public School’s Special Education Transformation Team;
- Participation on a recent Early Learning Opportunity Act grant around school readiness and early literacy. The grant included specific strategies to include our DD children in discussions regarding pre-literacy, readiness to learn and better connections with schools and their neighborhoods and transitions. If this grant is successful, KCDDD will have an opportunity to participate on the steering committee.

These efforts have created several opportunities for collaborations, and these partnerships positively impact on the Early Intervention system. Many more collaborations occur directly between the providers and other collaborators. For example, at least two of our providers have contracts with Early Head Start to provide services for their Early Head Start children in need of Early Intervention.

The partnerships and collaborations will be maintained and increased. The following specific items will need to be addressed to improve our coordination efforts:

- Seattle-King County Public Health Office of Children with Special Health Care Needs and KCDDD have agreed to inventory our programs and identify areas of overlap. We have also agreed to establish pathways to ensure appropriate linkages and referrals, and to determine ways we can enhance each other's service delivery systems.
- Continue working on, and finalize the formal relationship developed between the King County Board for Developmental Disabilities and the KCICC. These advisory group changes are supported by flexibility provided in the new contract for Part C services, motions passed by both the KCICC and the County Board.

SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

Through our various feedback opportunities as well as experience as the local lead agency, KCDDD staff has learned there are several major service issues which need to be addressed. Following is a list of those issues to address during the up-coming planning cycle.

- A shortage of financial resources is the overriding issue. Available funds for sub-contracts in 2002—including DDD Child Development funding and Part C combined averages are approximately \$3,400/child/year. Divide that by \$30 an hour, (including an agency's administrative costs) and see how many of hours of service a child can receive (only 2 hours a week!). While early intervention services are individualized based on the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP), it is not at all uncommon that it is recommended a child participate in special instruction activities twice a week for 1 ½ or 2 hours a session. This does not include the even more expensive therapies by physical or occupational therapists, or speech therapists. Because available financial resources have remained static, and the number of children continues to grow, next year the average reimbursement will likely decrease. It is anticipated our provider system will contribute through fund-raising efforts slightly more than \$1.0 million this year towards Part C services. The KCDDD Board will include on their 2004 legislative agenda the need to address funding shortfalls for county services and continue to support increases in federal funding for Part C.
- Increase the number of participating school districts. Currently 5 of 19 King County school districts participate. Currently it is estimated there are approximately 400 children a year receiving services in our system who reside in a serving school district. If the remaining 14 non-serving school districts became participants in 0-3, they would bring an increase in revenues to the system of approximately \$2.9 million dollars. Efforts must continue to increase the number of school districts participating, not only for the added revenue, but also because it is our belief the relationships built in this partnership will enhance the school experience when the child transitions to a pre-school district programs. KCDDD staff has recommended that King County support

legislation to further school district participation early intervention in collaboration with provider agencies, professional organizations, local ICC's and County Boards, and ITEIP.

- Examine alternatives for more equitable distribution of available contract funds for child development and early intervention. Because some school districts currently participate, and others do not, those providers receiving school district funding have significantly greater resources available to them. This disparity in resources and availability of funding support depending on where one lives will receive a critical examination as part of contract planning for 2004 and 2005 by KCDDD. KCDDD staff intend to utilize a work group process to provide input and guidance in this process.
- Develop service guidelines—including payer of last resort and financial hardship guidelines, autism service guidelines, and guidelines for purchasing assistive technology. King County will develop guidelines to provide direction and consistency within the local system and also work with other agencies and with the state Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC), and local community stakeholders to develop best practice guidelines. As Pierce County is currently developing policies and service guidelines, KCDDD staff intends to review their products and, potentially, adapt the materials for use in King County.
- Upgrade and maintain a loaner bank for FM systems that can be readily accessed by families for their infants and toddlers with hearing losses.
- Seek the involvement of ITEIP and the State ICC in addressing the labor shortage of specialized early intervention staff. The lack of trained personnel will impact our ability to serve children in a timely manner. This is an issue nationwide and will not be addressed locally at this time. It remains an important issue; however, if we continue to encourage school districts to become partners in early intervention services, we must continue to have high personnel qualifications in order to meet school district qualifications. This does, however, also raise the issue of retention. School district wages and benefits tend to be more attractive to potential employees than those of nonprofit agencies providing child development and early intervention services. KCDDD staff recommends that the State ITEIP program address this statewide issue.
- Several agencies are completing training with the University of Washington in a well-established model for assessment and intervention services for infants and toddlers suspected of having autism spectrum disorders. Research shows the value of intensive services for toddlers with autism and autism spectrum disorders, generally around 15 hours a week. Professional early intervention services, those provided by special educators and speech therapists, at 60 hours per month far exceed the average available financial resource of \$291 per month. The ability to provide adequate services for this growing population is very challenging. This will become part of the discussion around the need for and strategies to obtain additional funding.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPROVEMENTS

As mentioned earlier, KCDDD management has developed and now is refining a System Improvement Plan that includes the service improvements that are contained in this three year plan. In addition, the System Improvement Plan includes a series of recommendations for administrative changes in the operation of the system by KCDDD as the local lead agency and administrator of state funds for child development services. The System Improvement Plan incorporates changes that are underway in 2003 as well as future administrative improvements being considered for 2004 and 2005. KCDDD will seek the input of providers and other stakeholder through time-limited work groups to evaluate and make recommendations on the specific changes related to the contracting and payment processes that will impact agencies and the county's administration.

The following have been identified as potential areas for administrative improvements in the local system:

- Actively participate in Department of Community and Human Services work group to review and recommend changes in Agency Services Standard Contract (the "Boilerplate") for 2004. Specific areas being considered for improvement are standards for oversight and governance by Boards of non-profit agencies and information on fiscal condition of contractors.
- Determine if child development contracts exhibits that are currently in place achieve the desired results for providers and KCDDD in terms of fiscal management and budgeting. The current exhibits provide a set level of monthly reimbursement based on provision of service to a minimum number of children; Redistributions (upward adjustments) may occur only if the agency exceeds a threshold percent of the minimum service levels and funds are available within the State DDD contract. Reductions in payment occur in any month in which the agency drops below the contracted minimum service levels. Changes of this type were implemented with the July 2003 amendments for child development services.
- Determine if the current rate structure for child development services should be modified to take into account any or all of the following factors: differential for services provided in "natural environments" or in non-agency setting; availability of school district funding; incentives for accessing other resources; clearer delineation of what services or costs the child development funds are covering; and the "fit" of that payment structure with Part C requirements for payer of last resort.
- Evaluate and determine whether contracts for child development and, possibly, Part C services, should more clearly identify agency service models, specify which services will be provided by an agency, and describe the geographic target area and/or target population.
- Evaluate for 2004 implementation potential change in contracts for Part C services that reduce, if possible, amount of detailed information required as part of the billing while complying with payer of last resort requirements and ITEIP

data system requirements. As with child development contracts, evaluate the continuing use of a differential payment for services provided in “natural environments” or non-agency settings.

- Develop and implement uniform payment policies including “financial hardship” policies for families refusing to allow agencies access to private insurance. KCDDD staff also recommends establishing a fee schedule for purchase assistive technology such as hearing aids and FM systems.
- Work in collaboration with providers and community partners to strengthen financial foundation of the local system. Options could include providing time-limited technical assistance to any provider that falls below a benchmark level for generation of funds from sources other than KCDDD contracts. Work in collaboration with providers, advocates and other counties to increase insurance coverage and reimbursement rates for developmental therapies and assistive technology such as hearing aids.
- Continue to advocate with ITEIP, the state Division of Developmental Disabilities, and elected officials for solutions to address the fact that the current system in King County, and statewide, is grossly under funded. By working with other stakeholders, KCDDD looks also to achieve system improvements and to develop public policies that address the fact that local lead agencies and providers cannot continue to provide the full range of Part C services to increasing numbers of children and families with static funding levels.

The challenges in maintaining and improving a local system of services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays are enormous. Contracted agencies are challenged by an economic climate in which obtaining charitable contributions is increasingly difficult and costly. The Seattle Post-Intelligencer on August 14, 2003 carried a front-page article headed: “Lean times for city’s non-profits – weak economy makes Seattle the hardest place in nation to raise money.”

Changes in contracting methods and other administrative changes will not solve the underlying problems of an under-funded system. King County urges State ITEIP staff and State ICC to identify ways in which the State Plan for Part C can be modified to address the current fiscal realities coupled with increasing demand for early intervention services.